

**A STUDY OF THE INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL PROCESSES
OF INSTITUTIONALISATION:
ESTABLISHING THE PRACTICES OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

by

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A thesis

presented to the University of Technology, Sydney

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requirement for the degree of

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I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

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Signature of Candidate

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. A. Hirst', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Christine Hirst

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The journey is the reward

Chinese Proverb

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Abstract

This research is a study of how practices emerge and become established within an organisation. Institutional studies present different process models, however few have considered how they emerge and become established, other than by means of legitimacy and diffusion. Tolbert and Zucker (1996) defined institutionalisation as a sequential model of three processes, each had its own focus and was described within the context of certain institutional dimensions and outcomes. They indicated that similar processes could be played out between as well as within organisations. Based on this assumption the research aimed to extend this framework and develop a processual analysis of the institutionalisation of a practice at the intra-organisational level.

To gain an understanding of these changes, the research positioned the study within the context of a practice. This was defined as knowledge management, a phenomenon which represented a set of practices which have been adopted by organisations over recent years. The methodology required a structured approach. This led to the development of the *reference framework*, which defined the inter-relationship between processes, practice, the intra-organisational context and time. It also provided the means to explore certain institutional dimensions and outcomes based on: theorisation, diffusion, formalisation and internalisation. Based on a sample of organisations across different industries, the research design consisted of three phases. The first was exploratory, the second was based on a mixed methods approach; the final explored the processual outcomes in terms of institutional dimensions and the different levels of change. The second and third phases were used to frame the intra-organisational processes of institutionalisation of a practice.

The results showed that through studying practice within the intra-organisational context, this had generated important insights into the processes of institutionalisation. The research found that theorisation activity lay very much at the hands of the leader and their knowledge and willingness to champion the practices. Examples were found of the different pressures upon organisations to adopt the practices. Variations in formalisation related not only to the different stages of change but also to the many different approaches of implementation. It was found that internalisation was affected by people understanding the value of the practices not the concept of knowledge management. Finally, the process analysis defined expands the narrow focus on intra-organisational dynamics, as well as providing a bridge between practice and institutionalisation.